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PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN UNION.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

CHRIST-CHURCH CATHEDRAL, FREDERICTON,

2ND SEPTEMBER, 1853,

BEING THE FRIDAY EVENING AFTER ITS

Consecration,

By THE REV. THEODORE EDSON, D.D.

Rector of Lowell, Massachusetts.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CLERGY.

FREDERICTON :

PRINTED AT THE ROYAL GAZETTE OFFICE BY J. SIMPSON, QUEEN'S PRINTER.

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The EDITH and LORNE PIERCE
COLLECTION *of* CANADIANA



Queen's University at Kingston

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SERMON.

EPHESIANS iv. 4, 5, 6.

4. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling :*

5. *One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

6. *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

The subject of this passage and its connexion, is the *unity of the Church*. This is set forth in the Scriptures every where as of essential importance. In the Old Testament the *unity of the Church* was guarded by the most express and solemn provisions. The Saviour himself inculcated it in the strongest terms as necessary to its greatest usefulness and efficiency. "That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that the world may know that thou hast sent me." This unity was most earnestly taught and maintained by the Holy Apostles, and beautifully exemplified in the primitive Church.

I will advert in their order to the great principles of this union, as they are named by the Apostle in the text.

THERE IS ONE BODY. The Church is a body: not an abstraction merely: not a theory only: not a spirituality: but a body. A body implies organization, dimensions, form. Applied to a society it denotes limits distinctly marked. It is **ONE BODY**. The oneness of the Church is a oneness of body. However many its members, however numerous its branches, however diversified its limbs, yet, as the human "body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ," *i. e.* the Church of Christ. "There is one body,"

AND ONE SPIRIT. For as the human body is animated by its spirit, and that spirit is one and indivisible, so that if a limb be severed from the body the spirit is not thereby divided so

as to animate alike the separated parts, but remains with the vital portion only; so the Holy Spirit, animating with life and efficacy the body of Christ's Church, is one spirit; and is a principle of union in the Church, as is the spirit of a man in the human body. The unity of the Church is a oneness not only of *body* but of *spirit*.

ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING. Likeness of condition and wants, of pursuits, of objects and hopes, is a ground of sympathy and a bond of union. This is one of the principles of union in Christ's body, the Church. That all are originally in the same lost condition, all need the same salvation, that all are to be saved by the same general means, and the same process of divine renewal, conducive to the same results on the character here, and all indulging the same blessed hopes hereafter, is an efficient preparation for a practical and delightful union of spirit and bond of peace among the members of Christ. Called in one hope of their calling into the same body, inheriting the same promises, they are united in the same interests, in the same means, and in the like endeavours to make their calling and election sure.

ONE LORD—the proprietor—the owner—the head. We have then one organization of homogeneous material, controlled by one mind, one body, and one spirit, with one head, one will, one source of authority; and that authority, that head, the Lord Jesus Christ, the husband and bridegroom of the Church, who loved the Church and gave himself for it. The members of the Church being thus vitally and directly connected with Christ, He becomes the great and effectual point of union to the body.

ONE FAITH is another principle of union. It is no easy matter, as is well known, to bring a large body of people to think precisely alike on all the various topics which come before them. The Church is an extensive society. And it is the condition of all association that some liberty must be restricted in order to secure the remainder, and to obtain other advantages of union. Men in society are put under a certain degree of restriction in order to preserve their freedom in matters that come within that restriction. This is the true notion of social liberty. The highest degree of civil liberty is attained and secured only by preserving the proper balance between restriction on the one hand and freedom on the other.

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The Church has ever recognized this principle, as well in matters of faith as of practice. There are certain truths which are essential, being the very instruments in the hands of the Spirit of practical salvation. The essential truth, which he that believeth may be saved, *the faith*, so called, is one; and herein there must be union in the Church, otherwise her foundations are subverted. In the essentials of faith there must be agreement. But by the good Providence of God these essentials are very few, plain and distinct. They are comprized in that primitive, and by the Church universally received formula, the Apostles' Creed. This is the faith into which her members are baptized, that to which they as christians are pledged when they are initiated into her pale. Herein her faith is and ever has been one and the same.

You will observe that these distinctive, and saving, and consequently essential articles of the christian faith, are expressed in terms of extensive comprehension. In drawing the line of restriction the Church has made the circle so large as to comprehend the greatest freedom of opinion compatible with union in the essentials of the faith. By adopting the happy medium she secures union on the one hand and freedom on the other. The enlarging of the platform of faith can be done only by throwing out essential doctrine and marring the system of divine truth. By increasing the articles required restriction is increased, the platform is narrowed, liberty is infringed, schism is provoked, and the oneness of the faith violated. That the Church in her ancient Creeds has taken the true medium of restriction, whereby she hath kept the faith, and of freedom of opinion whereby she hath kept the unity of spirit in the bond of peace, has been tested by her long experience in the use of one and the same Creed from the Apostolic to the present age.

And observe the perfectly practical method whereby she holds and inculcates this unity of faith. She introduces her Creeds into her Liturgy, so that on every occasion of public worship her members,—men, women and children,—are called upon audibly to repeat and openly profess belief in the several articles of the christian faith. Thus these great truths, the very implements of the soul's salvation, are kept constantly before the mind. Then these same truths are so incorporated throughout her services, are made the very framework of prayer, are interwoven with all our wants, as argument and encouragement with God, as impulse and direction to the affections, so interwoven are they with the warmest devotions of the heart,

quicken the energy of supplication, and inspiring the confidence of filial trust, that they obtain lodgement in the best feelings of the soul, they become inscribed on the enduring tablet of the heart, with the cumulative authority of successful experiment. Thus the oneness in matters of faith is not a mere head work only, our devotions are so imbued with them, that we pray them into our very heart, "one Lord, one faith," and

ONE BAPTISM. This is the ordinance whereby we are incorporated into the body of Christ's Church. It is the sacrament of initiation to membership, the line of distinction which marks the limits of the society. That simple, solemn institution of Christ himself, for the express purpose of admission to his Church, whereby the Apostles admitted every member whom they received when they went forth among the various nations of the earth, actually became the form of initiation in all the branches of the Church; so that a person thus admitted in one branch was received as a member in all other branches. The one baptism was acknowledged among all the different tribes and kindreds of the earth wherever the body was to be found. However the distant branches might become diversified in matters non-essential, however they might vary the unpre-scribed ceremonial of the transaction, yet the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, was the one baptism, into the one faith, practised and professed by all, whereby a member thus admitted was a member of the whole body. On this fundamental point the practice of all branches of the Church of Christ was and has been essentially the same. And to this day the one baptism marks, before God, before the Church, and before the world every member of the one body.

ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL, WHO IS ABOVE ALL, AND THROUGH ALL, AND IN YOU ALL. In this oneness of God the Father, who is over all, reference seems to be made to that superintending divine Providence which, in all past time, has so signally interposed to preserve the Church in its integrity; which Providence, being that of the same God and Father, we have reason to hope, will overrule to promote the welfare and the oneness of the same body. *And through all*, refers to that one and the same blessed spiritual influence which, like an unbroken cord running through all branches and members of the body, becomes a strong bond of union to the whole. *And in you all*, alludes to that precious indwelling of God, that

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participation of the divine nature, that manifestation of the Saviour's presence to the souls of true believers, whereby He is said to dwell in them and they in Him agreeably to his gracious promises. "If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "And I will manifest myself to him." "I in them and thou in me." "Behold I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice and open the door, *I will come into him and will sup with him and he with me.*" "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him." "So he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." "One God and Father, in you all." Amazing truth! A wonderful bond of union is this! In the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ he offers and gives himself to be taken and received by the faithful; thus renewing their spiritual life, increasing and strengthening their vital union with himself and with each other. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." By the right and frequent partaking of that one bread are we made of the one body: union with the Church is strengthened and sustained, Christ is received. He gives us his flesh to eat, comes unto us and dwells in us, God the Father, Spirit, Son, over all, through all, and in you all!

Such brethren is the oneness of the Church, and such are some of the great principles of Christian union, as the same are enumerated by Saint Paul in the text. Schism is a state of separation from the great body of the Church by the sundering of some or all of these ties. It is a grievous sin against the body of Christ, fraught with manifold evils to the community, and with great danger to the transgressor. Christians are liable to fall into sin. Surrounded by temptations and inclined to evil, they are too frequently ensnared; and while they should be lights in the world, and examples to others, they may themselves become sadly involved in sin. When they violate the third commandment they commit the sin of profaneness. When they indulge in evil speaking they violate

the ninth commandment, and commit the sin of slander. When they transgress the tenth commandment they commit the sin of "covetousness, which is idolatry." And so the violation of these principles of Church union is sin against the welfare of *His Church*, who prayed, and labored, and suffered, that its members might be all one. And as there are (it may be) many christians who are guilty (it is to be feared) of the sins of covetousness, and of slander, so is it to be feared there are many christians guilty, more or less, of the sin of schism.

Sins may be committed ignorantly. Saint Paul persecuted the Church ignorantly. It was a grievous wrong notwithstanding. God knows what deductions to make for the ignorance of the offender, and how to estimate rightly the offence. One may be in a state of schism through ignorance. But when duly admonished it behoves him to inform himself. He must not willingly continue in ignorance when he might have the means of knowing. Ignorance is but a poor excuse to him who intentionally retains it.

One may have been born in a state of schism, and may have received all his early training under its influence. However such circumstances may, in his case, extenuate the *guilt* of schism, which is not for us to decide, they do not supersede its mischiefs. An infant child may be nursed at the breast of an inebriate, and even fed with intoxicating drinks. And how far his consequent habits of intemperance are chargeable to his own fault, it is hard to say. But of the mischiefs of drunkenness, there can be no question. God only knows how to distribute the responsibility with perfect accuracy, and how to dispense a righteous judgment. There is great danger lest one bred in schism should never be persuaded to renounce it. The strong influence of early convictions involves the soul in a snare from which reason and truth may not be able to deliver.

Associated as we are in society, there is great danger of partaking in the errors and wickedness of those around us. Thus many of the primitive christians were so situated in the midst of surrounding idolatry, as to make it exceedingly difficult to take and maintain such a course as should not involve them at all in the idolatrous practices of their relatives and neighbours. So is it difficult for us always to avoid giving encouragement to the prevailing schism with which we unavoidably come in contact. The holy Scriptures are not wanting in admonitions on this subject. Saith Saint John, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed : For he that

biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." And Saint Paul cautions Timothy not to "be partaker of other men's sins." Difficult as it may, at times, be to avoid participation of the sin of schism, so rife around us, yet it should not be forgotten that it is a sin productive of enormous mischiefs, which we cannot countenance and encourage without partaking of the guilt thereof.

We christian brethren are highly privileged in that we belong to a Church not in a state of schism, but of the one body, the body of Christ: As a body in connexion with Christ: by a connexion with which we have connexion with Christ our Head: "Members of Christ," and if faithful to these principles of union, "children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

And one Spirit—as not spirit without body, so not body without spirit. Let christians feel continually (and they cannot feel it too impressively) their entire dependence in all outward ministrations of the Church upon that Divine Spirit, which inspires and animates the body. Let every outward exercise be but the form of the spiritual, every external, the expression of its internal.

And be united in the hope of your calling. Aim at one and the same point of attainment. Use the same means for the same ends. The will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you is your sanctification. Your greatest fitness for Heaven, is the purpose of the Church, by training in God's worship, and by subjecting you to the enlightening influence of His truth. Keep this object in view. With singleness of aim, with urgency of effort, press onward in the same way which Christ hath consecrated, toward the mark of the prize of your high calling.

One Lord, who must be our Lord, our Supreme Master, whose will we must obey, whose interest we must serve, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the Church, its Proprietor, its Head, the Chief Corner Stone of its foundation. We must have the one Lord, and the same which the Church has and ever has had, and no other. Not an imaginary Christ, not a mere man, not a superior creation of angelic nature, not a fanciful being, but He, the same that founded the Church, declared it to be a perpetual institution, and promised to be with it to the end of the world, its Head, its Lord. This Lord must be our Lord; His will, our will; His word, our law.

One Faith must we have, and that the same which was once delivered to the Saints, the Church, and transmitted in her

Creeds. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." But what Christ? The Christ of the Church. Christ as set forth in articles of "the Faith once delivered to" her, and which she has transmitted. Believe these truths of Christ, the Christ set forth therein. Receive, embrace, confide in this Christ, "and thou shalt be saved:" The one Faith and the same from its first delivery till now.

One Baptism, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, must we be baptized with. "He that believeth (the one Faith) and is baptized, shall be saved." It is by baptism that we are connected with the one body of Christ, are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. "Our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." Let the unbaptized yield themselves to this positive requirement of Christ; and in the exercise of Repentance and Faith, and in submission to His will and authority, be received into the body of His Church, and be made partakers of the promises and hopes with which the Lord hath endowed His spouse. Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; that one Spirit which animates the one body, into which ye are incorporated by the one Baptism.

And let it be remembered that this incorporation is to be quickened and sustained by frequent communion with the body by prayer, and by the faithful use of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. That bread which he gives is his flesh, which he gives for the life of the world. And thus, feeding his people, he dwells in them, and they in him, and the Spirit hath his Temple of their bodies, and dwells within them, and the Father makes his abode within them. The one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, is also in all the true and faithful members of this one body: "which is *His* body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." So that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, (amazing condescension!) *dwelleth in them*. "That ye" saith the Apostle, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

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